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CHAPTER 9

THE VISUAL ARTS, 1050-1350

The period of Iranian history covered in this discussion began with the rise of the Turkish dynasties of the Ghaznavids and of the Great Saljuqs and ended with the small Iranian or Mongol dynasties which followed and contributed to the fall of the Īl-Khānīd empire. The specific dates quoted above are only approximations since stylistic and thematic changes do not necessarily coincide with major historical events, but the period as a whole is one in which all provinces of Islamic Iran and all media of artistic creation underwent considerable changes and in fact established architectural, formal, iconographic, and aesthetic standards which were to remain for many centuries thereafter those of Islamic Iranian art in general. This statement is valid in the sense that the arts of the following centuries can almost always be shown to be in a definable kind of relationship to forms, ideas, and techniques created or developed between the eleventh and the fourteenth centuries. Yet, if these filiations with later centuries can indeed be established, it is far more difficult to define the relationship of this art to that of previous centuries. In fact our documentation on and conceptual framework for the arts of the first four centuries of Islamic Iranian art are so limited and so much tied to the interpretation of a few texts or to purely accidental finds, that, with a few exceptions to be mentioned in due course, we will consider the art of Iran during the centuries under consideration as a new creation. If it is perhaps too adventurous to call it a renaissance in the sense that it does not seem to be in continuous but in revolutionary relationship to what preceded, it is not too far-fetched to talk of an artistic explosion, for, regardless of its complexity in details, the period which produced the mosque of Iṣfahān, the minaret of Jām, the mausoleum of Sanjar in Marv, that of Öljeitü in Sulṭānīyeh, Kāshān and Ray ceramics, the "Bobrinski" kettle, the Wade cup, the "Demotte" Shāh-Nāma, and the manuscripts of the Raṣhīdiyya can by any account be considered as one of the most productive and most brilliant periods of Iranian art.

INTRODUCTION

The period is not an easy one to define properly. First, the disastrous lack of proper monographic studies—except in the case of a very few objects and buildings¹—makes any generalization somewhat hazardous. Secondly, the periodization of the different artistic entities which can be defined is impossible in anything but the most general terms. To give but a few examples, one may point out that the period of the Great Saljuqs (roughly from 1050 to 1150) is almost totally *terra incognita* in all but architecture, while the century which followed the death of Sanjar is tremendously rich in properly dated objects but exhibits an original architecture only in a few small monuments from areas peripheral to the Iranian world, primarily Āzarbāijān, and a few cities of Central Asia. Other instances are ceramics, in which some of the most remarkable objects of the so-called “Saljuq” style were demonstrably manufactured after the Mongol conquest; and manuscripts, among which the greatest masterpiece of the fourteenth century, the “Demotte” *Shāh-Nāma*, has never found the artistic and intellectual or social milieu in which it was made. Thus it is, at this stage of our research, still almost impossible to co-ordinate properly the monuments with the events of the time; and often in trying to explain the monuments one misses the human and spiritual context in which they were made and used. Hence, even though one must be cognizant of the classical divisions of styles into a *Saljuq* period (roughly until the third or fourth decade of the thirteenth century) and the Īl-Khānīd one (roughly after the last decade of the same century), we shall in this chapter avoid these distinctions on the ground that neither the monuments nor the social and cultural history of Iran have as yet been sufficiently explained to make the time distinctions more than convenient labels for museum identification.

Yet this lamentable historical vacuum is not the only methodological deficiency with which we have to cope. An equally frustrating problem is posed by what may be called the geographical co-ordinate of the arts. It is clear for instance that the third, fourth, and fifth decades of the twelfth century witnessed a remarkable building activity known primarily through large congregational mosques in the area of Iṣfahān, that the last decades of the twelfth century and the thirteenth

¹ Among the few examples are D. S. Rice, *The Wade Cup* (Paris, 1955), to be consulted together with R. Ettinghausen, “The ‘Wade’ Cup”, *Ars Orientalis*, vol. II (1957); R. Ettinghausen, “The Iconography of a Kāshān Luster Plate”, *Ars Orientalis*, vol. IV (1961); M. B. Smith, “Material for a Corpus of Early Iranian Islamic Architecture”, *Ars Islamica*, vols. II, IV, VI (1935-9).

century saw major constructions of mausoleums in Āzarbāijān, that inlaid metalwork was developed to a particularly remarkable degree in Khurāsān in the second half of the twelfth century, and that Rashīd al-Dīn sponsored a major school of painting in Tabriz in the first two decades of the fourteenth century. In all four of these instances there is no evidence that any other part of Iran enjoyed the same developments. Should any of them then be considered as regional growths to be explained by some local needs or purposes? Or are they purely accidentally preserved and should a style or an idea formed in Khurāsān in the middle of the twelfth century be construed as valid for the rest of Iran? It is of course clear that each such definable group of monuments will provide different answers to these questions. The Rashīdiyya school of painting *did* have a greater importance in the development of Iranian art after the death of its founder in 1318 than the architectural style of Āzarbāijān in the thirteenth century. Yet almost no attempt has yet been made by archaeologists or historians to separate pan-Iranian trends from local ones or to assess the exact character of any one provincial development,¹ and to the questions raised almost thirty years ago by Professor Minorsky,² scholarship has still not provided answers.

These methodological and intellectual difficulties in any attempt to discover the structure—the word is used here in the sense given to it by linguists or ethnographers—around which one can explain the monuments of Iranian art and their development makes our task of discussing them in a few pages particularly arduous. To attempt a chronological description would take us too long and is somewhat meaningless without at least partial solutions to the questions raised in the preceding paragraphs. A discussion of techniques separately from each other would correspond to traditional methods of treating Islamic art, but its underlying assumption of separate developments for each major medium would have to be demonstrated for this particular period and in any event it would not provide a clear summary of the visually perceived world created during these centuries. Our choice, therefore, has been to avoid any attempt at total coverage but rather to select a more limited number of precise topics through which, it is hoped, one may be able to define the major characteristics of the arts of the eleventh to fourteenth centuries and also point to the problems which still need

¹ Preliminary remarks for the fourteenth century by D. Wilber, *The Architecture of Islamic Iran: The Ilkhanid Period* (Princeton, 1955), pp. 88 ff.

² V. Minorsky, "Geographical Factors in Persian Art", *B.S.O.S.* vol. ix (1937-9).

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to be solved. Three such topics were chosen: the architecture of the mosque, the objects of the twelfth–thirteenth centuries, the painting of the fourteenth century. Each of these, as we will try to show, serves as a focal point around which most of the major monuments and problems can be discussed. Much in the interpretations which will be proposed is still hypothetical, but it is our belief that only through working hypotheses can the actual significance of an insufficiently studied art properly emerge.

THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE MOSQUE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

The central phenomenon of the architecture of Iran during these centuries is the formation of what may be called the classical Iranian mosque. Almost its most perfect example is found in the now ruined *masjid-i jum'a* of Varāmīn (fig. 1; pls. 1, 2), near Tehrān. It is a rectangle, 66 by 43 metres, with a remarkably clear plan. A courtyard in the centre was lined with an internal façade; on either side lies an axial *ivān* (definable as a rectangular vaulted hall of which one side opens directly to the outside) framed by two or four smaller arched openings. The *ivāns* are not of equal size and the centrally planned balance of the court is overshadowed by the strong longitudinal axis of the wider *ivān* on the *qibla* side (pl. 2) which is followed by a superbly majestic dome rising high above the rest of the building. The area between *ivāns* is at the same time quite open for circulation and yet definable through a series of long vaults carried on square or rectangular supports. A curious sort of ambiguity remains as to whether these supports are actually piers imagined as separate entities or walls opened up by wide arches. There are three entrances to the building, each of which is a shallow *ivān* leading into the axial *ivāns* of the court. The main entrance, on the longitudinal axis, is architectonically articulated through a series of niches and prefigures the composition of the *ivān qibli*.

The medium of construction is brick throughout. Its fabric varies from place to place and thus serves at the same time as a mode of construction and as decoration. The vaults are usually pointed barrel vaults. The *ivāns* and the zone of transition to the dome are provided with a characteristic architectonic composition known as the *muqarnas*. It consists of a combination—variable in structure and extent—of complete units of construction, such as half-domes and vaults, or segments thereof, used, at least in appearance, either to give variety to

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a wall surface or to organize the passage from one form to the other, as from square to octagon or from walls to vault. Throughout the building decoration is at the same time omnipresent and subordinated to architectural lines. Several different techniques are used: imaginative

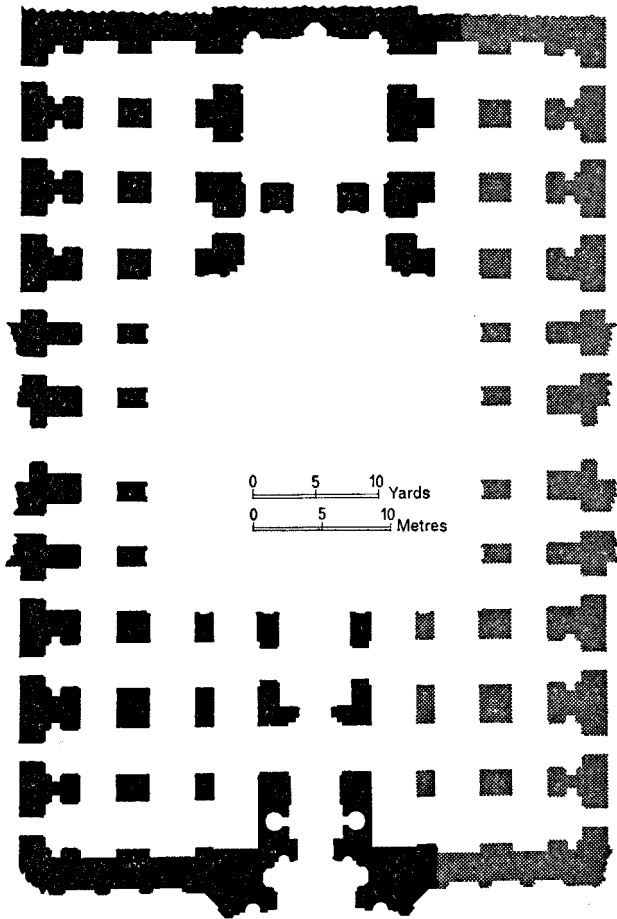


Fig. 1. Plan of mosque at Varāmin.

variations in the fabric of construction, stucco, terra-cotta, colour faïence. Although vegetal motives do exist, the main designs are either epigraphical or geometric. The former, with their religious or historical subject-matter, serve also to identify the purpose, quality, and time of execution of the building. The latter are used to strengthen the main

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lines of the building and have been used in a particularly effective fashion.

Such are briefly the major characteristics of the mosque of Varāmīn.¹ Their significance is that almost all of them were created or developed during the two and a half centuries which preceded the building of the mosque. The time of invention, history, or purpose of most of these features are still not well understood and each one deserves a separate monographic treatment. We shall limit ourselves here to a rapid discussion of some of the problems posed by the most striking identifying characteristics of the building.

The first one is the plan of a mosque with four ivāns around a court (pl. 3) and with a large dome on the axis in front of the *mihrāb*. The establishment of this plan, which remained characteristic of Iranian architecture for many centuries, has been the subject of much controversy and the question of the origins of this plan demands some elaboration. It seems clear that, toward the end of the first half of the twelfth century, a whole group of cities in the western Iranian province of Jibāl either acquired totally new congregational mosques or replaced older, presumably hypostyle buildings with new ones. The reasons for these transformations are not certain. There may have been local reasons in each instance, like the 1121-22 fire which destroyed most, if not all, of the older mosque of Iṣfahān. Or else these mosques simply reflected the growth in wealth and population of the province under the rule of the Great Saljuqs. Whatever the reasons, in Iṣfahān, Ardistan, Gulpāigān, Barsian and Zavāreh,² new mosques were erected, all of which exhibit sufficiently related characteristics of style and plan that they form a clearly identifiable architectural school.

The masterpiece of this school is undoubtedly the mosque at Iṣfahān, but it also has a number of internal peculiarities due to the presence of older remains (to some of which we shall return) and to a particularly complicated later history.³ As a result it is perhaps less immediately useful to define *typical* features than it is to illustrate the higher technical and aesthetic values of the style. More typical is the

¹ Latest description with bibliography in Wilber, pp. 158-9.

² In addition to the studies by M. B. Smith quoted previously (especially in *Ars Islamica*, vol. iv), the most convenient introduction to this group of monuments is by A. Godard, "Les Anciennes mosquées de l'Iran", *Āthār-e Īrān*, vol. 1 (1936), and "Ardistan et Zavareh", *ibid.*

³ A. Godard, "Historique du Masdjid-é Djum'a d'Isfahan", *Āthār-e Īrān*, vols. 1, II, III (1936-8); A. Gabriel, "Le Masdjid-i Djum'a d'Isfahan", *Ars Islamica*, vol. 11 (1935).

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mosque at Zavāreh (fig. 2), built in 1136. It is a simple rectangle with an unobtrusive side entrance, an appended minaret, a courtyard with four *ivāns* prominently contrasted in plan and elevation from the rest of the building where clearly identified piers support barrel vaults: a large dome appears behind the *ivān* qiblī. This basic kind of plan was imposed elsewhere on more or less complex older remains and in a more refined way appears at Varāmīn.

But there is a further complicating factor. Whereas in Zavāreh the whole building was conceived as a unit, in a number of other examples,

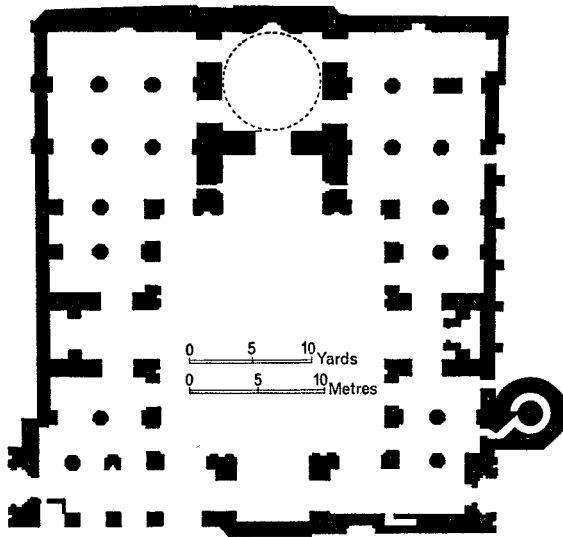


Fig. 2. Plan of mosque at Zavāreh.

the dome appears to have been built separately and often the presently known areas surrounding the domes are considerably later than the dome itself.¹ Hence there is the possibility that the large dome in the back of the traditional Iranian mosque had a history independent of that of the court with four *ivāns*.

From this observation there has emerged the one consistent theory explaining the growth of the Iranian mosque. A. Godard has introduced the hypothesis of a "kiosk-mosque", which originated in the single domical fire-temple of Sassanian Iran and which consisted in a single domical structure at one end of a large open space. It is only little

¹ A list of such buildings is in A. Godard, *L'Art de l'Iran* (Paris, 1962), p. 343.

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by little, argued Godard, that such open areas became entirely built up, and it is a peculiarity of the early decades of the twelfth century that the architects of western Iran introduced a court with four *ivāns* to surround the dome. The origin of the four *ivāns* is found in eastern Iran, where it is assumed to be the characteristic plan for the private house. And the reason of this impact of eastern Iran would have been the impact of the one new kind of building known to have been created in the eleventh century, the *madrasa*, an institution created in part for the re-education of the masses in orthodoxy and presumed to have originated in activities carried out first in the private houses of eastern Iran.¹

Such is, in a slightly simplified form, the presently accepted theory; but there is much in it which is hypothetical and uncertain. First the degree of archaeological and historical precision which is required in such hypotheses does not exist for the monuments of eastern Iran² and the little that is known of eleventh- and twelfth-century architecture in Transoxiana and *Khurāsān* offers no example known to me of mosques with four *ivāns*.³ There is much danger in relating relatively well-known monuments, like those of Jibāl, with far less well studied ones and, as was mentioned before, our understanding of the character of the provinces of Iran is far too uneven to allow for generalizations. Secondly, even if it is quite likely that there were instances of fire-temples transformed into Muslim oratories and that single domical sanctuaries were indeed built, it is nonetheless true that the small space thus provided is not very well suited to Muslim cultic practices, especially in larger cities. Furthermore, there is a tradition of a dome in front of the *miḥrāb* going back to the Umayyad mosque in Medina; in this instance the domed areas also served as a *maqṣūra* (reserved area) for the caliph or his representative. It so happens that, in the case of the mosque of Iṣfahān, the domed room in front of the *miḥrāb* is provided with a

¹ The clearest statement of the position is in A. Godard, "L'origine de la madrasah", *Ars Islamica*, vols. xv-xvi (1951). An earlier but particularly acute criticism of these and other arguments for the kiosk-mosque appears in J. Sauvaget, "Observations sur quelques mosquées seldjoukides", *Annales Institut d'Etudes Orientales, Université d'Alger*, vol. iv (1938). For the madrasa as an institution, see now G. Makdisi, "Muslim Institutions of learning in eleventh century Baghdad", *B.S.O.A.S.* vol. xxiv (1961).

² This is particularly true of the presumably critical madrasa at *Khargird*; cf. the objections raised by K. A. C. Creswell, *The Muslim Architecture of Egypt*, vol. II (Oxford, 1959), pp. 132-3.

³ There is no easily accessible and complete description of Central Asian monuments taken all together; the most convenient introduction is G. A. Pugachenkova, *Puti razvitiia arkhitekturi Yuzhnogo Turkmennistana* (Moscow, 1958); now also *Istoriya iskusstv Uzbekistana* (Moscow, 1966).

formal inscription giving the name of Nizām al-Mulk and thus dating it between 1070 and 1092. This together with other bits of evidence analysed by Sauvaget¹ suggests that some, if not all, of these large domes had a ceremonial princely significance. Or, alternatively, all of them could have had a primarily religious and symbolic significance in emphasizing the orientation of the building and the direction of prayer.

This latter point may be strengthened by the third difficulty involved in the classical scheme explaining the formation of this type of mosque. It is that the plan of the court with four *ivāns* itself is not particularly adapted to the ceremony of prayer. It is a centrally arranged plan revolving around a court and it does not in its simple form provide the automatic orientation which is essential in a mosque; hence the widening of one *ivān* and the large size of the dome could be interpreted as necessary adaptations of a given type of plan to new purposes. Moreover, there is considerable evidence that the plan was a ubiquitous one, i.e. that it was a sort of standard arrangement which could be—and was—used for many purposes. This is shown partly by its impact on regions west of Iran, but also by its occurrence in secular structures, such as the magnificent twelfth-century caravanserai of Ribāt *Sharaf*² or the *Ghaznavid* palace of *Lashkari Bāzār*.³

Pending further studies and especially excavations of pertinent buildings, it would seem, therefore, preferable to argue that, while the *fact* of the creation of a new type of mosque in the early twelfth century in western Iran is undeniable, the *reasons* for its creation in this particular form are not yet elucidated. Yet, even though the peculiar combinations and uses of *ivāns* and domes which were thus created appear as new, their immediate adaptation and their continued utilization over several centuries indicate that in some way these elements of plan and elevation struck a particularly meaningful chord in the Iranian vision of its monuments. Was it a revival with modifications of the forms of Sassanian architecture with its domes and *ivāns*? Then one may indeed suggest that it was a renaissance. Or did these forms continue over the preceding centuries in ways of which we are not aware? Then it would be more appropriate to talk of a blossoming of seeds planted earlier. Or was this new architecture the result of the impact of the new Turkish masters of political power who would have served as catalysts to the

¹ Cf. above note 1, p. 633.

² A. Godard, "Khorasan", *Ālḥār-é Irān*, vol. IV (1949).

³ D. Schlumberger, "Le Palais ghaznévide de Lashkari Bazar", *Syria*, vol. XXIX (1952).

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formalization of indigenous traditions or brought new ones from the East? Then indeed these monuments may appropriately be called *Saljuq*.

Yet, until new research has brought answers to these questions, it may be preferable to talk more modestly of a western Iranian type of mosque plan created in a clearly defined period and with considerable impact on later centuries. Through its form in Varāmīn in the early fourteenth century, one can imagine the changes brought into it: strengthening of a longitudinal axis through an elaborate gateway (the *pīsh-tāq*), simplification and standardization of systems of support, partial decrease in relative size of the court, more elaborate proportions between parts. The ways in which these changes were brought in and their chronology are still matters which have to await investigation.

Although the plan with four *ivāns* became the standard plan for mosques, it should be noted that it does not define all types of mosque buildings erected during these centuries. Especially in the early fourteenth century there were many instances of repairs and reconstructions in older buildings¹ and a particularly noteworthy feature was that a large building like the mosque of Iṣfahān was subdivided into smaller units, thereby suggesting a change in the religious practices of the time and the apparent uselessness of the large early congregational mosque. More extraordinary is the one significant remaining mosque which clearly identifies the Īl-Khānīd imperial style. Built in Tabrīz between 1310 and 1320 by 'Alī-Shāh, a vizier of Öljeitü, it is known today as the "Fortress", the *Arg*. Originally there was a large court with a pool in the centre of the building, but its main unit was an *ivān*, 48 metres deep, 25 metres high, and 30 metres wide. Its walls were between 8 and 10 metres thick and its vault, which was meant to be larger than that of Ctesiphon, fell shortly after its completion.² This astounding construction was clearly megalomaniac and illustrates an odd variant within the traditional plan of the mosque.

Next to the plan, the most significant feature of the Iranian mosque as it appears in Varāmīn is its construction. And here again the main threads lead back to the architecture of the twelfth century in western Iran. Although stone was used consistently in many parts of Āzar-bāijān and unbaked brick or rubble in mortar in more prosaic buildings,

¹ There is no list available of these reconstructions but many instances can be found throughout Wilber's book and in several studies by M. Siroux, esp. in "Le masjid-e djum'a de Yazd", *Bull. Inst. Fr. Arch. Or.* vol. XLIV (1949).

² Wilber, pp. 146-9.

the standard medium of construction of most of Iran became baked brick. The significance of this point is twofold. On the one hand, it appeared in the late eleventh century with the domes of Iṣfahān as a comparatively new medium of construction in western Iran, while its sophisticated use can be demonstrated as early as in the ninth and especially tenth centuries in north-eastern Iran.¹ Thus the possibility does indeed exist that the development of brick architecture was part of a possible impact of one region of Iran over the other. On the other hand, as early as the first major datable constructions of the late eleventh century, the masons of Iran used their brickwork ambiguously, in that they transformed it into a medium of decoration. As a result wall surfaces can vary from the superb nakedness of the mosque of 'Alī-Shāh in Tabrīz to the involved complexity of the dome in Varāmīn.

But the most noteworthy constructional characteristic of these centuries occurred in the development of a new and more magnificent type of dome than had been known in Iran until then. It is not only the large miḥrāb domes which made this development possible. In a mosque like Iṣfahān there were several hundred smaller domes covering the areas between ivāns; few of these have been preserved and the identification of those which are of the twelfth century is another unfinished task of archaeological scholarship. Also in Iṣfahān there remains the probable masterpiece of early Iranian domes, the so-called north dome of the mosque (pls. 4, 5), originally probably a ceremonial room for the prince's entrance into the sanctuary. But in addition the eleventh, twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries witnessed a remarkable spread of monumental mausoleums, some of which continued to be tower-tombs as before, while others were squares or polygons covered with cupolas.² The greatest concentrations of the mausoleums remaining from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries are in Transoxiana and Āzarbāijān, while the fourteenth-century ones are more evenly spread all over Iran.³ Many of these mausoleums had a primarily religious character and this was the time of the formation of the large sanctuaries

¹ The recent discovery by D. Stronach and T. C. Young, Jr., of two eleventh-century mausoleums with extensive brick designs in western Iran will lead to new hypotheses on this subject, "Three Seljuq Tomb Towers", *Iran*, vol. iv (1966).

² For the period up to 1150 see the lists and bibliographies prepared by O. Grabar, "The earliest Islamic commemorative buildings", *Ars Orientalis*, vol. vi (1966); for later periods see D. Wilber, *passim*, and A. U. Pope, ed. *A Survey of Persian Art* (London, 1939), pp. 1016 ff. and 1072 ff.

³ In addition to the works quoted previously see M. Useinov, L. Bretanitskij, A. Aalamzade, *Istoriya arkhitekturi Azerbaidzhana* (Moscow, 1963), pp. 44 ff.

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of Mashhad and Qum, not to mention many smaller ones, like those of Bistām,¹ whose exact significance in contemporary piety is more difficult to assess. But the two greatest memorial tombs were primarily secular: the large (27 by 27 metres outside) square mausoleum of Sanjar in Marv and the even more spectacular octagonal (25 metres in interior diameter) mausoleum of Öljeitü, with a particularly complex history.²

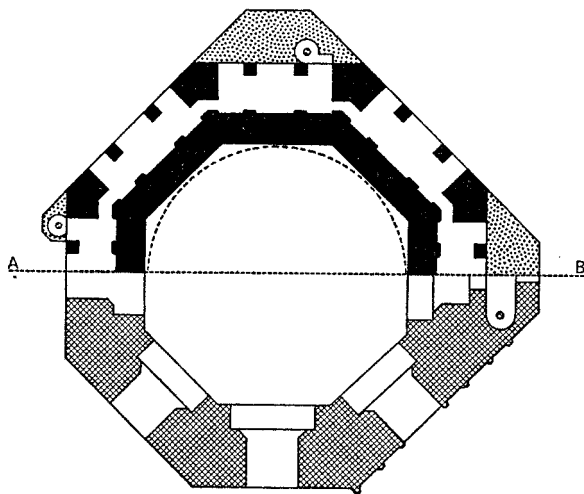


Fig. 3. Plan of mausoleum of Öljeitü at Sultāniyeh.

In spite of several pioneering studies,³ the exact characteristics and development of these Iranian domes are still insufficiently documented and I should like to limit myself to three features which seem to me to be of particular importance. The first one concerns the general appearance of these domes. During these centuries two separate changes were introduced in the construction of cupolas. One is the creation of a double shell, i.e. in effect two domes more or less parallel to each other. The phenomenon is peculiar to northern and north-eastern Iran and its first appearance occurs in monuments which have been variously dated in the eleventh or twelfth centuries.⁴ But, while it is obvious that this

¹ *Survey*, pp. 1080 ff.

² For the mausoleum of Sanjar see now Pugachenkova, pp. 315 ff.; for the Sultāniyeh one of the best studies is by Godard in *Survey*, pp. 1103 ff.

³ A. Godard, "Voûtes iraniennes", *Āthar-e Irān*, vol. IV (1949), and remarks by M. B. Smith in *Ars Islamica*, vol. IV.

⁴ In addition to Pugachenkova, pp. 275 ff., see A. M. Prubytikova, *Pamyatniki arkhitektury XI veka v Turkmennii* (Moscow, 1955). It seems still uncertain whether an eleventh-

development will have considerable importance for the changes brought into domes in the fifteenth century, the exact assessment of the reasons for the invention of the double dome is more difficult to make. It should probably be connected with a general interest on the part of north-eastern Iranian architects for the lightening of the mass of the dome, both in the literal sense of making cupolas less heavy and in the aesthetic sense of giving to the upper part of the building an airier look. In this latter sense the development must be related to an equally great interest in galleries around the zone of transition which were brought to a most perfect pitch in the mausoleum of Öljeitü. While such appeared to be the primary concern of north-eastern architects, those of western Iran had to tackle the huge domes in the back of their mosques. Their major contribution was a technical one; by an imaginative use of brick ribs around which the mass of the dome was built up, they solved the problem of making large cupolas without centring, but these ribs eventually became a single mass with the rest of the dome and should not be interpreted in the same fashion as ribs of Gothic architecture. It is perhaps in the Varāmīn dome that these two traditions—one concerned with alleviation of weight, the other with sureness of construction—meet most effectively in that the general shape and massiveness of the cupola relates it to western Iranian practices of the preceding centuries, while the striking use of windows is more typical of north-eastern tendencies.

The second noteworthy feature of these Iranian domes is their zone of transition effecting the passage from the square to the circular base of the cupola. The technique used throughout was based on the squinch creating an octagon. In a number of instances of larger domes, an additional sixteen-sided area was provided above the octagon. However, the most striking feature of the zone of transition during these centuries was the remarkably architectonic use made of the muqarnas by western Iranian architects. The origin and the exact purpose of this combination of architectural units is not known, but it seems likely, within our present evidence, that it developed in eastern Iran in the tenth century as a primarily decorative form.¹ In the eleventh century in western Iran the muqarnas acquired a more meaningful

century date is preferable to a twelfth-century one for many of these monuments. However, the discovery of the Kharraqān buildings clearly proves that the form existed in the eleventh century.

¹ The crucial building for this problem is the Tim mausoleum, whose latest discussion is by G. A. Pugachenkova, *Istoriya Zodchikh Uzbekistana*, vol. II (Tashkent, 1963).

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function as a working element in the upward movement of the dome. Logically constructed around a few basic axes of symmetry the muqarnas became the visible means by which masonry was articulated, at least as far as the viewer is concerned, for whether or not the actual thrusts from above were carried down the lines of the muqarnas is still a moot question. That an interest in the logical articulation of walls and masonries existed in Iranian architecture of the eleventh and twelfth centuries is clear from other instances as well, such as the unique structure of the piers in the north-eastern dome in Işfahān or the fascinating system of interlocking ribs in the mausoleum of Sanjar.

Yet it would be wrong to consider these interests, some of which were short-lived, or the muqarnas exclusively as actual or imitative constructional devices. They were also decorative ones and, even though during the period with which we are concerned the decorative function did not always overshadow other purposes in the domes as such, it did so in façades, cornices, and other parts of buildings. Thus the fascination with transforming constructional units into decorative ones, or in the better monuments, the creation of an ambiguous balance between decorative and architectonic values clearly appears in the uses of the muqarnas as early as in the eleventh century and is continued over the next two centuries.¹

On the last significant aspect of Iranian architecture at this time, we may be briefer, because this aspect has been treated with greater thoroughness than the others.² A look at the mosques and mausoleums shows the considerable part played by various decorative techniques in the final state of the buildings. Some involved the medium of construction, others were specifically ornamental techniques, such as stucco, terra-cotta, and coloured bricks or tiles. The former two techniques are not new, but the latter appears indeed to have been a creation of these centuries, still used sparingly when compared to what will happen in later times, but portentous of a new and highly original relationship between colour and architecture. On the whole, however, the major characteristic of decoration in the large congregational

¹ Several preliminary studies on the subject by J. Rosenthal, *Pendentifs, Trompes et Stalactites* (Paris, 1928), and *Le Réseau* (Paris, 1937).

² For a general survey limited in its monuments to Central Asia but with principles valid elsewhere see L. Rempel, *Arkhitekturni ornament Uzbekistana* (Tashkent, 1962) which has superseded the shorter *Arkhitekturni ornament Srednei Azii* by B. P. Denike (Moscow, 1939). For the specific problem of colour see D. Wilber, "The Development of Mosaic Faience", *Ars Islamica*, vol. VI (1939). Useful notes in *Survey*, pp. 1279 ff.

mosques is their subordination to architectural values. Rich though it may be in Varāmīn or the two large domes of Iṣfahān, its effectiveness lies in the way in which it emphasizes, strengthens, and accentuates lines and ideas of a preponderantly architectural vision of buildings. Nowhere is this more striking than in the superb masses of the domical exteriors. Yet, while this is generally true of the congregational mosques, it is less so of mausoleums, smaller sanctuaries, or the few known secular buildings. Pir-i Baqrān, near Iṣfahān, a small sanctuary for a local holy man dated between 1299 and 1312, is a true museum of stucco designs.¹ The mausoleums of Āzarbāijān carry an extensive surface decoration which all but obliterates their actual walls.² Ribāṭ Sharaf, a twelfth-century caravanserai, or the eleventh-century palace at Tirmidh had most of their walls covered with decorative designs and, in the former case, included even stucco imitations of brick walls.³ And the Jām minaret (pl. 6), like several other such structures perhaps more secular than religious in purpose, also has an almost total covering of decorative designs.⁴ It is as though the closer one comes to the little-known secular art of the time or to the more popular cults of saints the more brilliant and overbearing becomes the decoration, whereas the mosques maintain something of an ascetic dignity, more in keeping perhaps with the severity of official Islam.

It is difficult to sum up the characteristics of the architecture of Iran during some three centuries of numerous and varied building activities. Two major points seem to stand out. The first one is the apparent polarization in the twelfth century of major inventions in two areas: the north-east and the west, with a more minor but highly original centre developing late in the century in north-western Iran. While the contacts and influences between those centres are matters for debate, recent evidence seems to suggest that it is western Iran which created, at this time, the most unified architectural school, perhaps because it had been less developed and less creative than Khurāsān in the preceding centuries. The forms and ideas of plans and construction developed then were picked up by the Īl-Khānids in the early decades of the fourteenth

¹ Wilber, pp. 121 ff.

² In addition to relevant passages in Useinov and others, *Survey*, and Wilber, see various remarks by Godard in *Āthār-é Irān*, esp. vol. 1 (1926).

³ Cf. note 2, p. 639 above and for Tirmidh Denike's general study; on this whole point see also D. Hill and O. Grabar, *Islamic Architecture and its Decoration* (London, 1965).

⁴ A. Maricq and G. Wiet, *Le Minaret de Jam* (Paris, 1959). For other minarets see M. B. Smith, "The Minarets of Isfahan", *Āthār-é Irān*, vol. 1 (1936) and J. Sourdel-Thomine, "Deux minarets d'époque Seljoukide", *Syria*, vol. xxx (1953).

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century and, in conjunction with their own monumental ambitions and renewed eastern Iranian traditions, created the monuments of Tabriz, Sulṭāniyeh (pl. 7*a*), and Varāmīn. But the permanent coagulation of a series of definitive types and techniques seems, for the most part, to have been effected around 1100 in the West.

The second point concerns the character of this architectural typology, for it established the basis of almost all later developments in Iranian art. The building with an internal façade opening a court, the rhythms of fulls and voids based on *ivāns*, the mighty dome, the varieties of decorative techniques modifying the surface of the wall, and, among features which were not discussed, the tall, cylindrical minarets, and, at this time less developed, the high screen-like portal, these were all to become permanent features of medieval Iranian architecture. Whatever technical or decorative novelties were introduced in subsequent centuries, they were, for the most part, variations—sometimes far superior in actual quality and aesthetic merit—on the vocabulary of forms created in the twelfth century. That this happened altogether is more difficult to explain and, to a degree, the explanation lies in features of Iranian culture other than those of the visual arts alone. One possibility is that these immensely active centuries established the formal and aesthetic system of Iranian architecture in monuments—mosques, mausoleums, caravanserais—which by their very function remained in use for many centuries and thus forced themselves by their presence as permanent models. But whatever the explanation, there is little doubt that the monumental infrastructure created in the twelfth century may truly be called the classical period of Iranian Islamic art, for it consisted of monuments magnificent in their own right and at the same time sufficiently abstract in their formal and technical components to be used for centuries to come.

THE PORTABLE OBJECTS OF THE TWELFTH AND THIRTEENTH CENTURIES

Whereas the architecture created in the twelfth and subsequent centuries was the beginning of a fairly coherent development in which the innovating position of the twelfth century is clearly apparent, things are far less tangible when we turn to the other arts. As far as painting, mural or manuscript, is concerned, it is at the end of the thirteenth century that there begins a definite movement whose steps can be partly traced

and explained. To these we shall return later. For the earlier centuries we have a few texts, some more or less understandable fragments, and a few manuscripts which still await proper analysis.¹ A curious revival of monumental sculpture seems to have occurred at this time,² but its instances are few, its genuineness not always secure, and in any case its future development limited. There is, however, one area of artistic activity where the reverse is true, i.e. a tremendous development in the twelfth–thirteenth centuries and a partial decadence in the fourteenth. It is the area of the *objet d'art*. Furthermore, whereas both painting and architecture are hardly known in Iran before the latter part of the eleventh century, this is not so with respect to objects. Be it in ceramics or in metalwork, glass, and textiles, as early as in the ninth century major objects were made and definable schools are identified. Thus, at least on the level of the existence of a semi-industrial manufacturing tradition, a certain continuity seems to exist and in Iran, as elsewhere in the Islamic world, there appeared a fascination, unknown since Antiquity, with the transformation of the everyday useful object into a work of aesthetic quality.

Difficulties of interpretation arise, however, primarily from the enormous mass of objects which have been attributed to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Almost no museum in the world seems to lack a “Saljuq” ceramic or tile or a bronze stand in the shape of a bird. Furthermore, a rather indiscriminate scholarship abetted by the activities of clandestine commercial diggers in Iran itself, has created a terminology of styles and types based on cities or provinces—such as Ray, Gurgān, Kāshān, Sāveh—which only too often do not correspond to more than the alleged place of origin of the first-known objects of the given type. Finally, the lack of properly dated objects, and especially considerable uncertainty about the actual archaeological index of those objects which are dated have added to the confusion prevailing in the field, although no one can deny the aesthetic qualities and the sheer variety of the things made during these centuries nor the fact that their existence is one of the main features of the arts of this time.

In view of the unsettled state of our knowledge of these objects, our remarks will be limited to three points which seem to be somewhat more

¹ The most significant works involved are the mural paintings found at Lasharī Bāzār, above, note 3, p. 634, and the Istanbul manuscript of Warqah and Gulshāh, A. Ateş, “Un vieux poème romanesque persan”, *Ars Orientalis*, vol. IV (1961).

² R. M. Riefstahl, “Persian Islamic Stucco Sculpture”. *The Art Bulletin*, vol. XIII (1931); *Survey*, pls. 514 ff.

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clearly definable than any attempt at the explanation of styles or at the periodization and localization of types.

The first of these points involves techniques. In ceramics the most astounding variety of techniques were used in Iran: simple *sgraffiato* wares, moulded wares, translucent wares, underglaze painted, overglaze painted, lustre painted, and especially the so-called *mīnā'i* technique which permitted the clear fixation of many different colours on the surface of the object. Combinations of several techniques are not unknown.¹ A further significant development of ceramics was the tile. Sometimes used as a section in a larger frieze of consistent designs, the tile of the thirteenth century in particular was also often conceived as a single object, decoratively and iconographically self-sufficient, and it is with these that we will mostly be concerned. In metalwork, in addition to numerous gold objects, usually jewels, whose study has never been made, and a few silver ones, we encounter mostly bronze which was cast, chased, *repoussé*, or, most characteristically for the time, inlaid with silver.² None of these techniques, except *mīnā'i*, were new in themselves, but there is little doubt that techniques such as *mīnā'i* and inlaid metal were particularly developed because they allowed a greater refinement of designs on the surfaces of the objects.

The time of these changes in technical emphasis can probably be set in the middle of the twelfth century. For bronze the first-known object to illustrate the change is an 1148 penbox in the Hermitage Museum,³ although the most celebrated early example is the 1163 bucket (also in the Hermitage), well known by the name of its former owner as the "Bobrinski kettle".⁴ For ceramics the earliest dated faïence, a fragment in the British Museum, is from 1179 and we may probably assume that the main development of new ceramic techniques was probably contemporary with that of bronze.⁵ For other media our information is fragmentary, but the crucial ones of bronze and ceramics seem to indicate the middle of the twelfth century as the beginning of the main explosion of new types of objects. We are very badly informed on the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries. There are very few securely dated pieces and their position in the history of Iranian art is quite

¹ Best introduction in A. Lane, *Early Islamic Pottery* (New York, 1948).

² Best introduction by D. Barrett, *Islamic Metalwork in the British Museum* (London, 1949).

³ L. T. Giuzalian, "Bronzevoi kalemnan 1148 g.", *Pamyatniki epokhi Rustaveli* (Leningrad, 1938).

⁴ R. Ettinghausen, "The Bobrinski 'kettle'", *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, vol. XXIV (1943).

⁵ *Survey*, pp. 1672 ff.

unclear.¹ Tentatively and barring major archaeological discoveries, we may assume then that it is after the fall of the Great Saljuqs that the manufacture of objects developed in particularly striking new ways and that until then older techniques were preserved, but the explanation of these dates is a still unsolved problem of historical scholarship. A fairly clear ending to the series of ceramics developed in the middle of the twelfth century is provided by a study of the dated examples. The bulk of the objects are thirteenth century, without apparent effect from the Mongol invasion, but only lustre-painted tiles continue through the first third of the fourteenth century. After about 1340 there is a sudden lack of dated objects until around 1400. Metalwork, on the other hand, seems to have suffered from the invasion from the East. Practically no dated Iranian pieces are known after about 1225 until the latter part of the century when new objects were made for the new masters of the Near East and eventually a distinguishable school was established in southern Iran. Even though it may be assumed that new Iranian metalwork gave, in the twelfth century, a major impetus to Islamic metalwork in general, it is in the Fertile Crescent and Egypt that its greatest thirteenth-century masterpieces will be made.²

There is one last remark to be made about the techniques. They also, like the monuments of architecture, have regional associations. For metalwork it is quite certain that *Khurāsān*, or, more generally, north-eastern Iran, was the main centre from which new techniques derived and in which they were pursued until the Mongol invasion. A separate school has been suggested for north-western Iran, but its existence above the artisanal level is not secure. Ceramics are more difficult to localize properly, but there it would seem clear that the major impetus was in western Iran. *Kāshān*, of course, is the best-known centre and there is no doubt that its potters had acquired a particularly high reputation.³ The exact significance of the prominence of *Kāshān* for the evaluation of styles and techniques and for the attribution of pieces to specific centres is less easy to determine, for potters from *Kāshān* may indeed have worked elsewhere. But, in any event and regardless of the fact that ceramics of similar types were produced all over Iran, it seems that the new techniques and the new subjects originated primarily in western Iranian cities.

¹ This is particularly true of the so-called Alp-Arslan dish (*Survey*, pp. 2500 ff.).

² E. Kühnel, *Islamische Kleinkunst* (Braunschweig, 1962), pp. 175 ff.

³ R. Ettinghausen, "Evidence for the Identification of Kashan Pottery", *Ars Islamica*, vol. III (1936).

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It is thus primarily with the new ceramics of the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries and the new metalwork which can be dated between c. 1150 and c. 1220 that I should like to deal in introducing the second general point to be made about these objects. Their most striking feature is their use of human and animal figures. Such representational themes existed before, but clearly in a more limited way; they were either more or less sophisticated reflexions of folk art (especially in ceramics) or a limited princely vocabulary with many Sassanian reminiscences. The peculiarity of the iconography apparent in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries is at the same time its variety and the suggestion of a meaningful visual system of images, even though we are not yet able to translate the language in its entirety. But that we are dealing at this time with a conscious fascination with the animation of the object through figures is made evident by one of the most unusual phenomena of this time, the concomitant animation of inscriptions which occurs on the objects themselves and even on a few monumental inscriptions.¹

What were these scenes? At one extreme stand very precise iconographic subjects: an episode from the *Shāh-Nāma* redone in comic-strip fashion (pl. 7*b*),² the story of Bahrām Gūr and Āzāda in many forms,³ the story of Farīdūn (pl. 8),⁴ illustration of a specific (but unidentified) battle with the names of the personages involved in it,⁵ and, especially in tiles, a wide variety of subjects which can be described (an animal, a man reading a scroll, the façade of a building) but whose contemporary meaning usually escapes us. At the other extreme is found what may be called a generalized, abstract iconography, i.e. an imagery whose individual elements are easy enough to identify but whose significance on the object or for the viewer is less immediately clear. Three main cycles can be defined. One is the traditional princely cycle, with enthroned personages, male and female attendants, hunting, polo-playing, music and dancing. The cycle is usually shown in an expanded and full form on metal objects (pls. 10, 11), while one or the other of its elements occurs on ceramics, often in a very decorative fashion as frames for other subjects. Oddities and confusions do occur within the cycle, such as the backgammon players on the Hermitage kettle, but on the whole the cycle can easily be recognized and is consistent. The same is true of the second definable cycle, the astronomical one. It includes primarily the

¹ Best discussion published so far in D. S. Rice, *The Wade Cup* (Paris, 1955), pp. 21 ff.

² G. D. Guest, "Notes on the Miniatures on a Thirteenth Century Beaker", *Art Islamica*, vol. x (1943).

³ *Survey*, pl. 664.

⁴ *Ibid.* pl. 692 c.

⁵ *Ibid.* pls. 674-5.

signs of the zodiac and symbols of the planets, but a particularly interesting group probably made in Āzarbāijān included also labours of the month.¹ These themes are less common on ceramics but they do occur, usually on objects whose style and composition reflect metalwork.² The third cycle is more difficult to describe and it is possible that it may not be more than a variant of the princely cycle. It occurs primarily on ceramics and shows, at its simplest, one or two personages, of either sex, motionlessly sitting next to each other, or playing a musical instrument, at times near a body of water or beside a tree. The facial types are usually distinguishable by their heavy lower jaws, very simplified facial features, and narrow slit eyes.³ In a few instances, such as celebrated plates in the Freer Gallery and in the Metropolitan Museum (pl. 9), more personages are added and the possibility is suggested that these images belong to our first group of precise stories or events. Yet these objects differ in style from those which do show precisely defined iconographic subjects and all of them are pervaded by a curious sense of immaterial reality. For reasons to be explained below, we may call this a cycle of love or of meditation.

The peculiarity of these themes is that, except for the princely ones, they all seem to belong exclusively to the period between 1150 and around 1300. They almost totally disappear from later pottery, which tends to a far more limited representational vocabulary,⁴ and the themes of metalwork in later decades are either consciously imitative of early models or traditional in their use of princely themes. It must be added that any eventual complete survey of iconographic cycles on Iranian objects of this period should also include decorative designs which appear to be purely ornamental but may at times also have more precise meanings⁵ and a whole category of objects in the shape of animals, human beings, and even houses⁶ whose importance is as considerable as their number and as the paucity of attempts to explain them. But, even though often quite original and aesthetically spectacular, as a type these latter categories of objects are not as original in Iranian art as the ones we have described and the hypothesis we shall formulate presently to explain the latter may apply to them as well.

Our third general point about this whole category of works of art

¹ D. S. Rice, "The Seasons and the Labours of the Months", *Ars Orientalis*, vol. 1 (1954).

² *Survey*, pls. 712-13.

³ *Ibid.* pls. 686, 687, 693, 710, etc.

⁴ A. Lane, *Later Islamic Pottery* (London, 1957).

⁵ R. Ettinghausen, "The Wade Cup", *Ars Orientalis*, vol. 11 (1957), esp. pp. 341 ff.

⁶ *Survey*, pls. 739 ff.

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concerns the meaning which should be attributed to them. Regardless of their quality of execution, they were all useful objects, i.e. symbolically or actually they were meant to fulfil some function, whether it be pouring water or wine or holding flowers or sweets. It is therefore possible that in some fashion the imagery on them reflects either the precise function to which they were destined or some relationship between owner and object, or maker and owner, or giver and owner. In order to suggest the kind of relationship that was involved, a clue is provided by the inscriptions. The most common ones consist of a series of good wishes to an anonymous owner; at other times the owner is known and the object acquires a "personalized" meaning. Then there are inscriptions referring to the function of the object and wishing successful performance of the function. On ceramics are also encountered excerpts from celebrated literary texts or, more often, shorter poems dwelling in more or less successful fashion on various themes of love, separation, happiness, well-being, but especially love.¹ It is very rarely that one can find a direct and immediate correspondence between images on objects and inscriptions. However, it could be argued that the correspondence between them did not necessarily exist on a narrative and illustrative level but on some other level, just as the text and the image of a Christmas card do not necessarily relate to each other, although both reflect a series of more or less concrete sentiments accepted as being appropriate to the occasion. Since the inscriptions so consistently bring out themes of love and well-being, it may be suggested that the images should be interpreted in like fashion. No problem is raised around interpreting in this fashion the astrological images or the zoomorphic shapes of objects, since both of these themes have had a long history of apotropaic meanings.² Nor is the princely cycle particularly anomalous, since a semi-magical significance of power and success is traditional with any princely cycle since ancient Egyptian art. Illustrations of romances or references to well-known legendary or actual events can easily also be so interpreted. As to the theme of love or meditation, one could interpret it as a new iconography peculiar to these times and specifically related to the new development during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries of an esoteric poetry which was mystical and

¹ These texts have never been published systematically. For examples see M. Bahrani, *Recherches sur les carreaux de faïence* (Paris, 1937), and *Gurgan Faïences* (Cairo, 1949), and articles by L. T. Giuzalian in *Epigrafika Vostoka*, vols. III, IV, V, VII (1947-53); cf. summary by O. Grabar in *Ars Orientalis*, vol. II (1957), pp. 550-1.

² See article quoted in note 1, p. 646.

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religious but ambiguously used an erotic vocabulary for its deeper purposes. Such was the hypothesis suggested by R. Ettinghausen in a brilliant study devoted to a plate in the Freer Gallery.¹ Its ultimate significance was that there is a series of levels of meaning at which these Iranian objects can be understood and that, in all probability, a certain ambiguity was consciously maintained in the images, in part because the visual and poetic system of the literature itself was ambiguous but also because these objects were ambiguous in themselves, partly works of art and partly implements for daily living.

There is one last remark of significance to be made about the meaning of these objects. The Hermitage bucket was made for a merchant, as were a number of other known bronze objects from Iran. The excerpts from the *Shāh-Nāma* on the ceramics followed a popular, spoken version of the text, not the learned manuscript one. The poems are almost always in Persian. Various Šūfī groups had already by that time permeated the social organizations of the cities and provided them with an esoteric vocabulary which may or may not have always been understood at all levels of possible meaning. As a result one may draw the conclusion that it is the urban bourgeoisie of Iran which was the primary sponsor and inspirer of the astonishing development given to the beautiful object in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Parts of its themes were shared with the aristocratic milieu of princes but it is the city merchant and artisan who may be identified as the prime mover in the explosion of the art of the object. The development in Iran finds parallels in the Arab world with the illustrations of the *Maqāmāt* and its short-lived character can be explained by the decadence of urban life after the Mongols. As to why it was precisely in the second half of the twelfth century that this unique development took place, the question is still difficult to answer. Could it be a primary document for a shift in the power and prestige of the bourgeoisie at the moment when the strong arm of the Great Saljuqs was weakening?

PAINTING IN THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

It is generally recognized that, whatever its past, Iranian miniature painting began its known development with the Mongol conquest. One manuscript from the end of the thirteenth century, the *Manāfi' al-*

¹ R. Ettinghausen, "The Iconography of a Kāshān Luster Plate", *Ars Orientalis*, vol. iv (1961).

ḥayawān in the Morgan Library in New York dated 1291, is usually considered to be the first document identifying a major stylistic change. Then the school established by Rashīd al-Dīn (pl. 12) in the quarter of his creation near Tabriz is assumed, by the very character of its universal aspirations and the cosmopolitan position of the Īl-Khānīd capital, to have been a major catalyst in gathering new styles and ideas from many different sources. Out of it, with two extraordinary masterpieces, the "Demotte" *Shāh-Nāma* divided between many collections all over the world and the *Kalīla and Dimna* in the University Library in Istanbul, a fully Iranian artistic tradition was established, although the exact dates of these two manuscripts is not known and the proposed dates vary from 1330 to the 1370's. These two unique masterpieces are usually felt to be related to a number of manuscripts dated in the 1350's, a *Kalīla and Dimna* in Cairo and a *Garshāsp-Nāma* in Istanbul.¹ Parallel to this "high" development, there is assumed a "lower" or more provincial development, whose roots may go back to pre-Mongol times. It consists mostly of a group of *Shāh-Nāma* manuscripts, usually attributed in part to Shīrāz thanks to one manuscript dated in 1331, but it is agreed that other schools probably existed. In all of these manuscripts except perhaps the Istanbul *Kalīla and Dimna* there always appears something experimental, as though Iranian painters were trying to discover new modes of expression and, fascinating though many of them are, these miniatures give more rarely the sense of self-assured perfection which begins later in the fourteenth century under new and different sponsors and influences. Although no absolutely definite date can be provided for the change, 1370 seems to be as good a date as any, since several fragments of that time in Istanbul clearly show a very different style.² That, however, it is under the Īl-Khānīds that a new Iranian art of painting began has been fully recognized by the Iranian view of their own painting, since sixteenth-century writers clearly acknowledged that the reign of Abū Sa'īd (1317-36) saw the birth of painting and recognized the names of two artists of the time, Aḥmad Mūsā and Shams al-Dīn.³

In its general lines this schematic outline probably corresponds to the reality of historical development of painting in the first two-thirds of the fourteenth century. While there are certainly many obscure moments

¹ R. Ettinghausen, "On some Mongol Miniatures", *Kunst des Orients*, vol. III (1959).

² B. Gray, *Persian Painting* (Geneva, 1961), pp. 40 ff.

³ E. Schroeder, "Aḥmad Mūsā and Shams al-Dīn", *Arts Islamica*, vol. VI (1939).

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in this development especially as long as there are many documents which remain both unpublished and unclosely fitted within it,¹ the outline may serve as a sort of backbone which has the merit of identifying two precise strands, an imperial Īl-Khānīd one with cosmopolitan overtones, and several local schools, around which various miniatures or manuscripts can be arranged in a sequentially meaningful fashion. It is somewhat more difficult to relate the stylistic scheme to the political and cultural history of the time but these problems should be resolved whenever a clear picture emerges of Iranian history between the decline of the Īl-Khānīds around 1330 and the new Tīmūrīd order in the last decades of the century.

If, then, we leave for the time being the historical problems as being as adequately stated as evidence permits,² what remains is to try to explain what was meant by Dūst Muḥammad in the sixteenth century when he wrote: "It was then (the rule of Abū Sa'īd) that Ustādh Aḥmad Mūsā... withdrew the covering from the face of painting and invented the kind of painting which is current at the present time."³ Since we are inadequately informed on the intellectual framework within which Dūst Muḥammad made his remark, it is from the manuscripts themselves that we must try to discover in what ways the painting of the fourteenth century appeared revolutionary. Without attempting to be exclusive, it seems that there are two broad areas in which this painting is both new and the first step toward the art of the following period. These are first, subject-matter and the interpretation given to it, and secondly, the more precise problems of the representation of man and of landscape.

The subject-matter of Īl-Khānīd painting has a number of very traditional elements. The book on the usefulness of animals known in several manuscripts of the late thirteenth and of the fourteenth centuries is not by itself a new genre and instances of the same sort of illustrated books exist in earlier Islamic art. The book of *Kalīla and Dimna* was illustrated as early as the tenth century, although we do not have any remaining manuscripts before the thirteenth. A more original case is

¹ The unpublished documents include in particular the Istanbul albums and the Berlin one, about which we only know individual pictures which have been discussed. For fourteenth-century examples see R. Ettinghausen, "Persian Ascension Miniatures", *Accademia di Lincei, Rendiconti* (1956).

² In addition to B. Gray's recent book, one should consult I. Stockhoukine, *La Peinture iranienne* (Bruges, 1936) and E. Kühnel's chapter in *Survey*, pp. 1829 ff.

³ L. Binyon, R. Wilkinson and B. Gray, *Persian Miniature Painting* (Oxford, 1931), p. 184.

provided by the *Shāb-Nāma* and in general the epic tradition. Many of the illustrated texts had been written a long time before the Mongols; yet, until the Mongols, there is very little evidence of epic images on manuscripts (the main exception being probably the Freer beaker mentioned before,¹ but even there it may be questioned whether a consecutive narrative of its type is really characteristic of manuscripts) and the little we know is that there were mural paintings with epic scenes,² perhaps in the manner of the pre-Islamic Soghdian paintings from Panjikent. If we add to this that there are practically no known manuscript texts of the *Shāb-Nāma* clearly dated before the fourteenth century, it would follow that interest in and development of an epic art illustrating books on the legendary past of Iran appears to be an Īl-Khānid creation, or at the very least, underwent a tremendous increase in the fourteenth century.

Several reasons may be given to explain this phenomenon. One is the importance of aristocratic taste and patronage which would naturally be concerned with legendary heroes. Another may have been the rediscovery through the Mongols of the old Soghdian epic traditions.³ But the most compelling reason was probably the activities sponsored by the Mongol princes themselves, especially Ghazan Khān, which led to the foundation of Rashidiyya. For, as Ghazan and Öljeitü wanted to have the past deeds and mores of the Mongols recorded for posterity, they or their Persian executors had this specific aim fitted within a general world history, the *Jāmi' al-tawārīkh*. Manuscripts of this work were copied and illustrated and several examples are preserved of the presumably original group, especially those in the Edinburgh University Library and the Royal Asiatic Society, dated respectively 1306 and 1314, and in Istanbul (pl. 12). A fascination for history and the past was not limited to official sponsors and it has been recognized that the writing of history was a major characteristic of Īl-Khānid times.⁴ The *Āthār al-bāqīya*, also in the Edinburgh Library, dated in 1307-08 preserved illustrations of another compendium. It is only natural, under these circumstances, that the *Shāb-Nāma*, the most complete of the historical epics, be brought back into favour and

¹ Above, note 2, p. 645.

² *Survey*, p. 1374. Cf. also *Ta'rīkh-i Baihaqi* (Tehran, 1324), p. 501, among several other examples.

³ O. Grabar, "Notes on the Iconography of the Demotte *Shab-nameh*", *Studies in Honour of B. Gray* (forthcoming).

⁴ E. G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia* (Cambridge, 1961), vol. III, pp. 62 ff.

popularity and thus it is that aside from the uniquely superb "Demotte" manuscript¹ we have preserved several small *Shāh-Nāmas* (pl. 13) of varying quality whose detailed study still remains to be made.² All of them can be understood as the product of an awareness of more ancient times which was in fact an Il-Khānid phenomenon.

There were variations in the ways in which the past, legendary or not, was treated. The *Jāmi' al-tawārikh* and the *Āthār al-bāqīya* were primarily narrative books in which precise events were depicted and, especially in the former, long lists of rulers were given. As a result we meet with a re-discovery of portraits, neither likenesses nor fictitious authors' portraits, but set types identifying certain series of kings and emperors. Then we see specific scenes illustrated, and among these a number of images are clearly derived from models from the cultures whose histories or geography were described. Thus the representation of Tibet in the Royal Asiatic Society manuscript shows personages and building of Far Eastern character, while an Annunciation in the Edinburgh *Āthār al-bāqīya* has Christian models. But for the most part new iconographic cycles had to be created, such as a cycle for the life of Muḥammad, the first such cycle in Islamic art. This was made possible by the introduction into Iranian art of new compositional principles and of a small number of units of composition which were sufficiently flexible to be used meaningfully in different contexts and thus illustrate different subjects with a comparatively small number of elements. Among them one may distinguish a clear tripartite composition of each image, the groupings of personages in two's or three's to make a crowd and several variations within these arrangements, a landscape which is at the same time very simple and conscious of spatial values, a superb utilization of gestures of the head and especially of fingers, and a limited use of colour. The small number of these features lends a certain monotony to the scenes from the *Jāmi' al-tawārikh*, a monotony which is not always alleviated by the astounding quality of the drawing. But this monotony pertains also to the literary genre that was so illustrated. What seems far more significant is that these manuscripts and the school which produced them created and popularized

¹ D. Brian, "A Reconstruction of the Miniature Cycle in the Demotte *Shāh-nāmah*", *Ars Islamica*, vol. VI (1939).

² The most convenient list will be found in K. Holter, "Die islamischen Miniaturhandschriften vor 1350", *Zentralblatt f. Bibliothekswesen*, vol. LIV (1937), to be supplemented by H. Buchthal, O. Kurz and R. Ettinghausen, "Supplementary Notes", *Ars Islamica*, vol. VII (1940).

a new vocabulary of forms without which later Iranian painting is not quite understandable. As we shall see below, much of this new vocabulary was of Chinese origin, and this is easy enough to understand if we consider the world-wide character of the Mongol empire. What seems far more important is that a court-appointed school of painting succeeded in imposing its new patterns. That it happened must be attributed to the new interest in history and to the systematic distribution all over Iran of *Rashīd al-Dīn's* historical volumes.

If we turn to the more specifically Iranian *Shāh-Nāmas*, a clear distinction can be established between the small and more provincial manuscripts and the "Demotte" codex. The former are primarily narrative and show only to a limited degree, if at all, influences from the *Rashīdiyya*. Their origins may well go back to pre-Mongol times and perhaps even to media other than book illustrations.¹ Their quality varies, but in some of the more successful ones a rather effective result has been achieved by the puppet-like, richly coloured personages on a gold background with only limited landscape or architectural props. Only in the aesthetically less rewarding 1341 manuscript do we encounter a somewhat more developed landscape.

The "Demotte" *Shāh-Nāma* (pls. 13-15), on the other hand, is undoubtedly one of the most complex masterpieces of Iranian art. Its fifty-six known miniatures have been the subject of many discussions and controversies about both their dates and technical problems of retouching or altogether later additions to the manuscript.² That almost all the miniatures have been tampered with is clearly true and the original style of some of them is irretrievably lost. Yet it may be argued that on two counts essential for our discussion here practically all the miniatures can be used as evidence: the choice of illustrated subject-matter and the basic compositional pattern. In the first instance the miniatures have tended to emphasize certain subjects at the expense of others: legitimacy in large throne scenes and in specific stories dealing with the ways in which Iranian kings were discovered; the miraculous and the fantastic especially in the story of Alexander the Great (pl. 13); battles given monumental proportions either in single combats or in the dusty clash of competing armies; and especially death and mourning which inspired some of the most stunning compositions of the manuscript and which have led to the definition of one of the probable artists as a *maître du*

¹ B. Gray, *Persian Painting*, p. 58.

² The basic bibliography will be found in B. Gray's book, p. 173.

pathétique.¹ As far as compositional patterns are concerned, the striking feature of the "Demotte" *Shāh-Nāma*, when seen in relation to the *Jāmi' al-tawārīkh*, is that, while it clearly relied on the latter for many details especially in the grouping of personages, it expanded the image both iconographically by adding more personages and a far more developed landscape and spatially by devising more complex oblique and circular compositions, by multiplying planes of action, and by diffusing excellent draftsmanship with a far more expanded palette. In short, the artist or artists of the "Demotte" manuscript transformed the purely illustrative tradition of the small manuscripts and the technically perfect narrative of the Rashīdiyya ones into an intellectually and emotionally sophisticated interpretation of the Persian epic. In this sense it inaugurates what may be called a *heroic* tradition in Iranian art, just as the *Jāmi' al-tawārīkh* inaugurated a *historical* one.²

It is, thus, particularly unfortunate that we are still unable to define the milieu in which the manuscript was produced. Whether it should, in part, be interpreted as reviving a very ancient heroic tradition of painting almost unknown since the eighth century in Iran, whether it should be attributed to Tabriz because of its quality, of its relations to Chinese, Rashīdiyya, and even western arts and also because of its interest in Iranian legitimacy, a very Mongol concern, or whether it should be related to some Iranian milieu which saw in the tragically represented fate of Alexander the Great a parallel to the Īl-Khānids, these questions we simply cannot answer for the time being and yet they clearly are preliminaries to any proper understanding of the period and of its masterpiece.

In discussing the subject-matter illustrated by the *Jāmi' al-tawārīkh* and by the *Shāh-Nāma*, we have repeatedly mentioned an evolution in the representation and use of landscape, the importance of human groups and expressions, and the existence of a strong Chinese impact on some aspects of miniatures. These three features are actually closely related to each other and had a considerable impact on later Iranian painting. Therefore, they deserve some comment.

The most striking feature of the 1291 manuscript of the *Manāfi' al-hayawān* in the Morgan Library is that, next to a group of images which are relatable to thirteenth-century Arab painting with their single plane

¹ E. de Lorey, "L'Ecole de Tabriz", *Revue des Arts Asiatiques*, vol. ix (1935).

² This point has come out in a completed dissertation at the University of Michigan on the Istanbul Rashīd al-Dīn manuscript by Dr G. Inal.

indicated by a grassy band and their strong colouristic effects, there occurs a very different style in which ink drawing predominates, several planes are distinguished by a series of parallel or oblique lines, trees are no longer shown in their entirety, their trunks have strongly emphasized knots, some of the animals are even shown in monochrome against a bare sky. All these changes with their linear qualities and spatial concerns are clearly of Chinese origin. An even stronger Far Eastern influence occurs in the *Rashīd al-Dīn* landscapes with the introduction of Chinese-type mountains and a greater sophistication in the use of planes and of drawing techniques. The groupings of personages also bear the earmark of Far Eastern painting,¹ as do certain types of clothes, certain facial features, and the ubiquitous cloud form. These themes all remain in the "Demotte" *Shāh-Nāma* and the Istanbul *Kalīla and Dimna* in the sense that clouds, mountains, trees, certain flowers, groupings and personages, and certain spatial arrangements based on series of lines continue to be derived from Far Eastern art. And one can agree that Chinese painting—through its accidental impact by the nature of the Mongol empire and through the deliberate recourse to Chinese painters and works of art—created, or, at the very least, considerably enlarged the formal vocabulary available from then on to Iranian painters. It can further be agreed that the *Rashīdiyya* was one of the primary centres for the assimilation and dissemination of this vocabulary.

The new vocabulary which was thus created was rapidly transformed or, more precisely, it was used for purposes and in ways which have no relation to the place of its origins. Three principal areas can be identified in which Iranian artists so elaborated on their models as to make them not more than characteristic details. First, a great deal of the effectiveness of Chinese spatial and figural representations was lost when themes created in large scroll paintings were translated into the language of the more restricted illustrative miniatures. The frame of the *Jāmi' al-tawārīkh* miniatures often seems more like a straight-jacket and the tendency to explode the limits of the traditional miniature frame will remain a constant characteristic of fourteenth-century Iranian painting culminating in the highly original use of the margin and relations between text and image found, for instance, in the Istanbul *Kalīla and Dimna*.² A result of this concern with the frame of the

¹ For an analysis of a miniature from the manuscript, see J. Travis, "The battle of Ardavan and Ardashir," *The Art Quarterly*, vol. xxxi (1968). ² B. Gray, pp. 34 ff.

individual image, tied with the consistent importance of precise subject-matter, led to a growing tendency to crowd the interior of the miniature with many natural, architectural, or human and animal elements. Each one of these has probably its own story before it became a *type* or a *cliché*¹ but, in many of the "Demotte" miniatures, they filled almost all spaces and replaced the excitement of Chinese empty spaces (still evident in some of the earlier Persian miniatures) with the very Iranian fascination with colour.

The second area of Iranian elaboration concerns more specifically landscape. As one moves from the *Jāmi' al-tawārīkh* miniatures to those of the "Demotte" *Shāh-Nāma* or to the Istanbul *Kalīla and Dimna*, the individual elements of the landscape—the ground with its flowers or tufts of grass, the grey mountains in which fabulous monsters live, the trees which talk—become adapted to the needs of the story; they become real actors and not merely supports for action or brilliant symbols of space. As Alexander the Great reaches the end of the world, the ground suddenly changes into a striking deformed conception of the non-world. And nothing illustrates better the tragedy of the battle between Rustam and Isfandiyār than the blossoming setting with its little genre scene in one corner and the almost chiasitic arrangement of a blooming and of a dying tree in the centre of the composition (pl. 15). As these elements of the landscape increase in colourfulness and significance, they become more involved and more complex and, in an image like that of the king of the monkeys and the tortoise in the Istanbul *Kalīla and Dimna*,² the landscape almost overshadows the incidents of the story and becomes an end in itself, but perhaps its sombre symphony of colours reflects the gruesome and cynical moral of the story. Thus, pending necessary detailed analysis, one might suggest that, as it became involved in the complexities of illustrated events, the Far Eastern vocabulary of landscape forms acquired a very Iranian nationality and also became at the extreme limit almost an end in itself.

The final characteristic feature of this painting is its transformation of man into a hero. As early as in the *Jāmi' al-tawārīkh* the tall personages in their long robes and with their slightly bent heads become the principal subjects of the illustrations. The whole conception of the "Demotte" *Shāh-Nāma* further emphasized the point of the importance of man in the story and the human element is quite striking in the Istanbul *Kalīla and Dimna*, although perhaps more conventional in the provincial

¹ R. Ettinghausen, in *Kunst des Orients*, vol. III, for one such *type*.

² B. Gray, p. 35.

small *Shāb-Nāma*. But, even if one may agree on the preponderance of man in the fourteenth-century painting, the ways in which it is achieved were not consistently the same. Two main systems of representation may be identified. One may tentatively be called *aristocratic*. Its elongated personages are usually quiet and almost motionless, with perhaps a long finger or a slight movement of the head indicating emotional involvement. Facial features are usually carefully drawn and outlined. At the other extreme occurs a sort of *caricatural* or *pathetic* tradition. Bodies are grotesquely overdrawn, often shown in violent movements. But it is in faces, especially in some of the mourning faces of the "Demotte" *Shāb-Nāmas* or in the figures of executioners that a deformed expression serves both as a masterful vehicle for the representation of pain and horror and at times also for the ridiculous. In origin these two modes of representation may be related in part to certain Far Eastern ways; and the strangely unexplained drawings in an Istanbul album may be a later example of the caricatural style.¹ At the same time both modes hark back to obscure Iranian traditions as early as the eighth-century Soghdian ones continued in part in Central Asian painting.²

These remarks cannot be construed as providing a complete account of fourteenth-century Iranian painting. This task is impossible without many more detailed investigations than have been accomplished so far. Our attempt has been rather to focus attention on a few themes which seem to identify the first steps of a new Iranian art of painting: its relation to books and stories, its historical interest, the impact of Chinese painting as a creator of visual forms, the pre-eminence of human elements, the development of the landscape, the key position of the Rashīdiyya school. There is a constant feeling in surveying these paintings of an art in "becoming", i.e. of an art in search of the themes and forms which will best express the needs and aspirations of the culture which sponsored it. But we are still too ill-informed on the character of the culture and especially on what it expected of its painting to give an adequate account of the latter's meaning. That in the process an extraordinary masterpiece like the "Demotte" *Shāb-Nāma* could have been produced is a testimony to the vitality of the aspirations at work and to the fermentation of ideas out of which will emerge the more classically perfect painting of the Timūrids.

¹ See the preliminary studies by O. Aslanapa, R. Ettinghausen and M. Loehr in *Ars Orientalis*, vol. 1 (1954).

² For a general summary and a bibliography see M. Bussagli, *Central Asian Painting* (Geneva, 1964).

THE VISUAL ARTS

CONCLUSIONS

In attempting to summarize the character of the visually perceived world of Iran between 1050 and 1350, two points may be brought out as being of particular significance. First, this is the time during which Iran acquired its permanent monumental Islamic infrastructure, in the same sense that the contemporary Gothic world accomplished it for the Ile-de-France or for England. Whatever earlier religious architecture of Iran had been, it is after the growth of the monuments of the area of Iṣfahān in the early twelfth century and of monumental tombs everywhere that the more or less permanent forms of most Iranian architecture were established: court with *iwāns*, domes, and decorative techniques. However spectacular, and even at first glance revolutionary, most later developments will almost always appear as variations on themes of the twelfth century.

In painting and the decorative arts, if we except the unique but comparatively short-lived art of objects on a broad social base which developed in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the principal novelty of the period consists in the first moments of the known history of Iranian painting. In this realm one cannot argue as well that the miniatures of the fourteenth century formed the permanent taste of Iranian painting. Yet later painting cannot entirely be explained without the experiments of the early fourteenth century and especially without the body of influences at work at that time and the visual vocabulary which slowly emerged out of them. *Mutatis mutandis* and without in any way suggesting a relation of cause and effect between the two traditions, it may be suggested that Iranian painting of the fourteenth century stands toward later painting in the same relationship as Giotto and the International Style stand to the Italian Quattrocento.

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CHAPTER 9

General

Beside general, and usually unsatisfactory, works on Islamic art, the only truly usable introduction to the art of Iran is to be found in A. U. Pope, ed., *A Survey of Persian Art*, 6 vols. (Oxford, 1939), partly out of date. Familiarity

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with the contents of three periodicals is also essential: *Ars Islamica*, 16 vols. (1934-51); *Ars Orientalis*, 6 vols. to date (1953-66); *Āthār-e Iran*, 4 vols. (1936-49). For recent literature it is possible to keep up to date through the *Abstracta Islamica* published every year by the *Revue des Etudes Islamiques*.

Architecture

Photographs and brief introductions can be found in A. U. Pope, *Persian Architecture* (New York, 1965) and D. Hill and O. Grabar, *Islamic Architecture and its Decoration*, 2nd ed. (London, 1967). Most important articles or special studies will be found quoted there or in the notes to the pertinent chapter in this volume. Special mention should be made of recent efforts in Iran to provide systematic surveys, city by city, of the major monuments of the country. An excellent example is that of Lutfallah Hunarfar, *Ganjīna-yi āthār-i ta'rīkh-i Isfahān* (Isfahān, 1964).

Painting

The most convenient introduction to the subject is provided by B. Gray, *Persian Painting* (Geneva, 1961), with an excellent bibliography. Among more recent publications two merit special attention: E. J. Grube, *Muslim Miniature Paintings* (Venice, 1962) and B. W. Robinson, *Persian Miniature Painting* (London, 1967). Both are exhibition catalogues which do not claim completeness but which are provided with important commentaries on exhibited paintings.

Decorative Arts

There is at present no convenient introduction to the ceramics, metalwork, glass, or textiles of the centuries under consideration in this volume and one would have to begin with the specific studies quoted in our notes. Some important preliminary remarks may be found in Charles K. Wilkinson, *Iranian Ceramics* (New York, 1963) and D. Barrett, *Islamic Metalwork in the British Museum* (London, 1949).

CHAPTER 10

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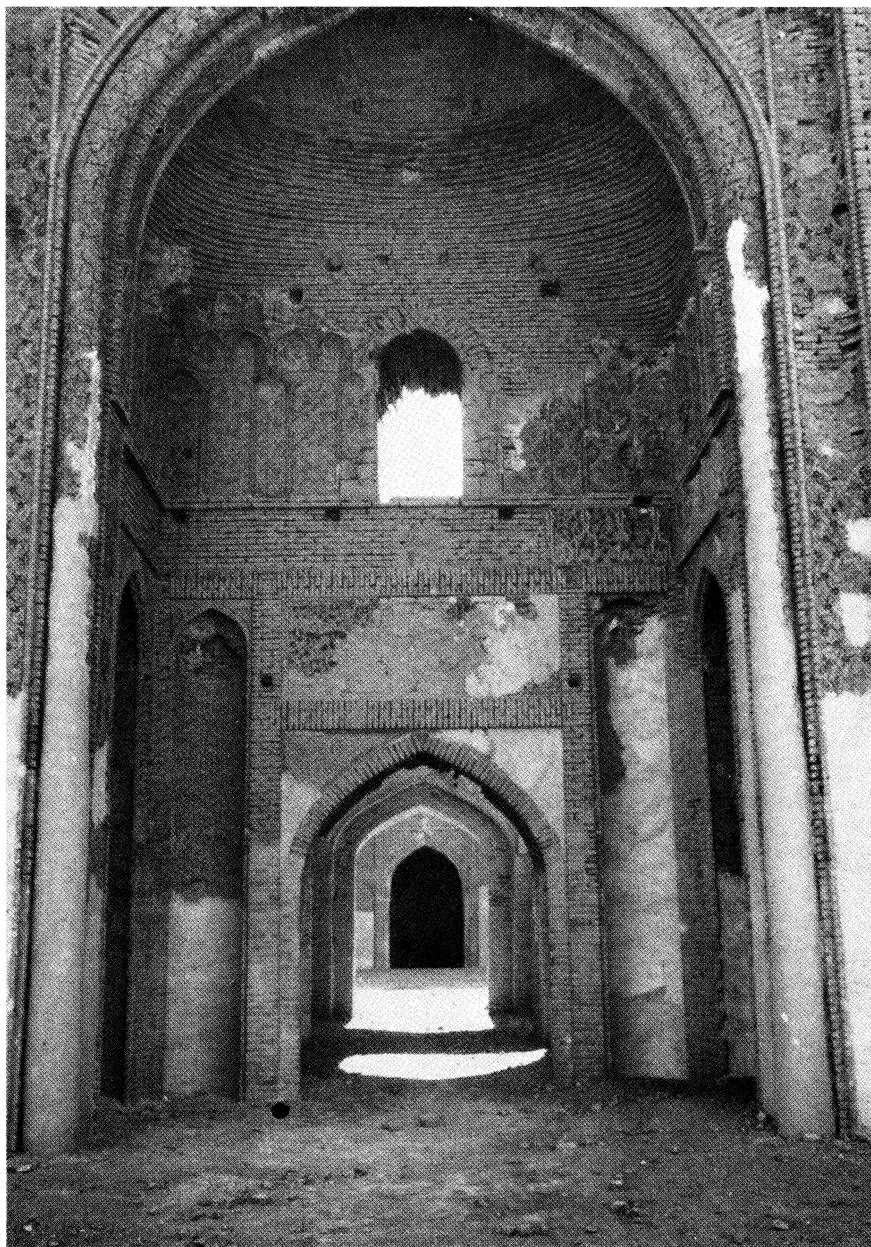
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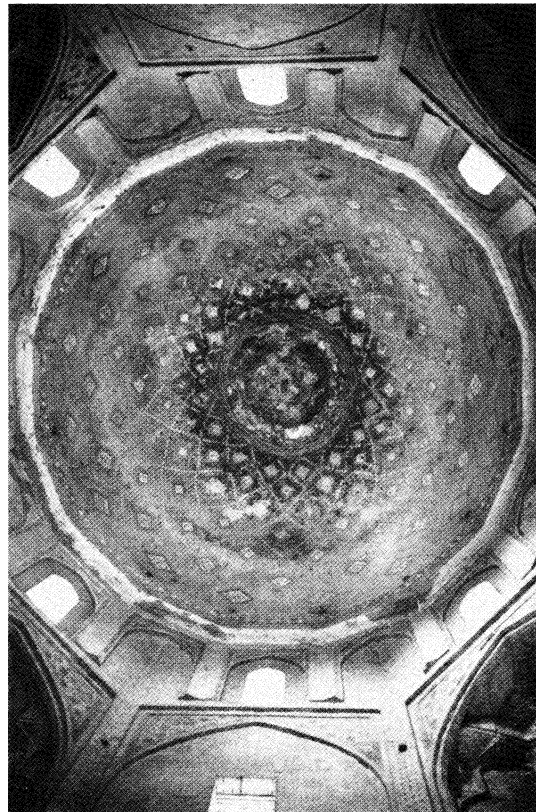
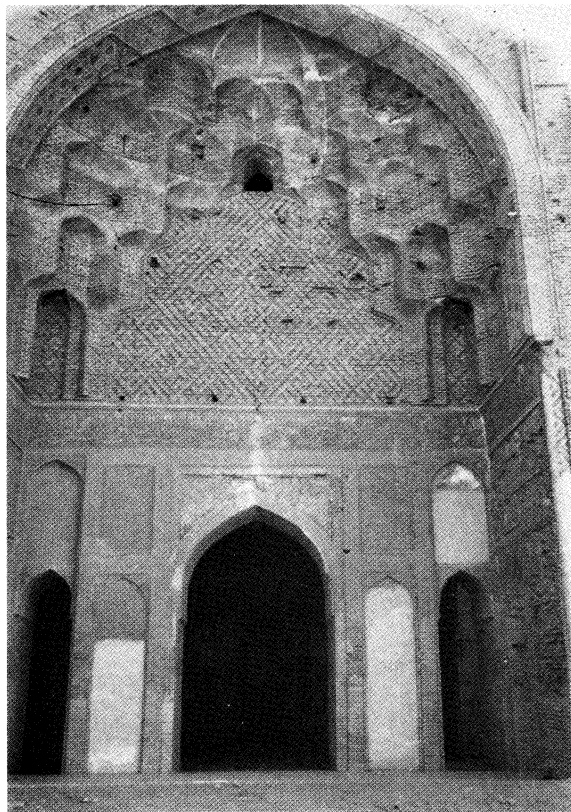
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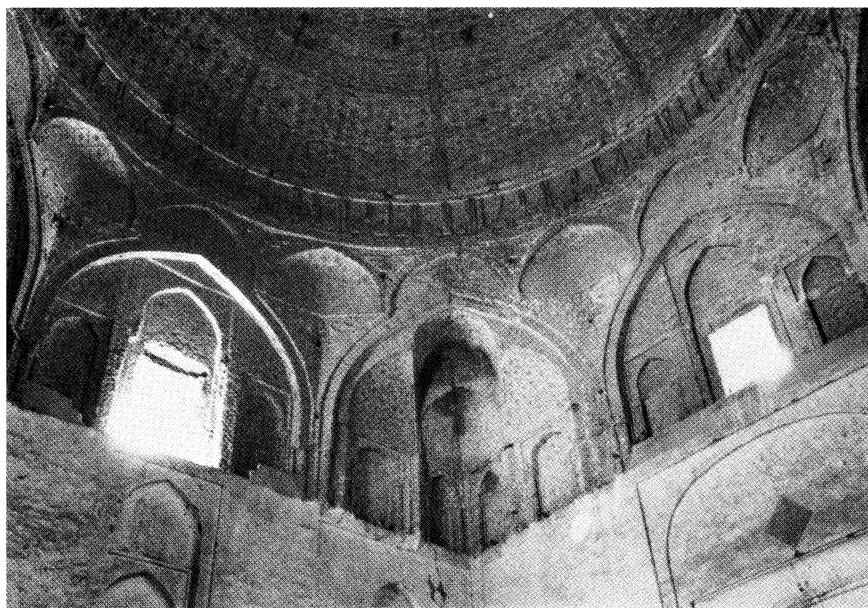
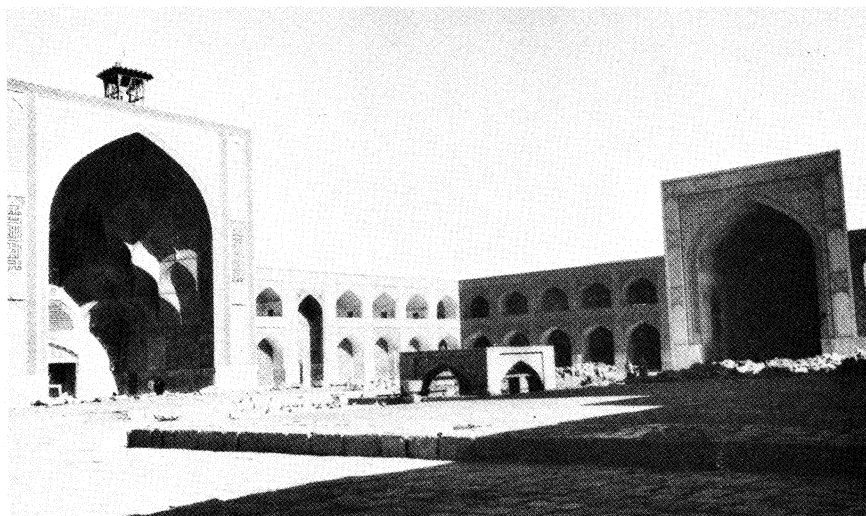
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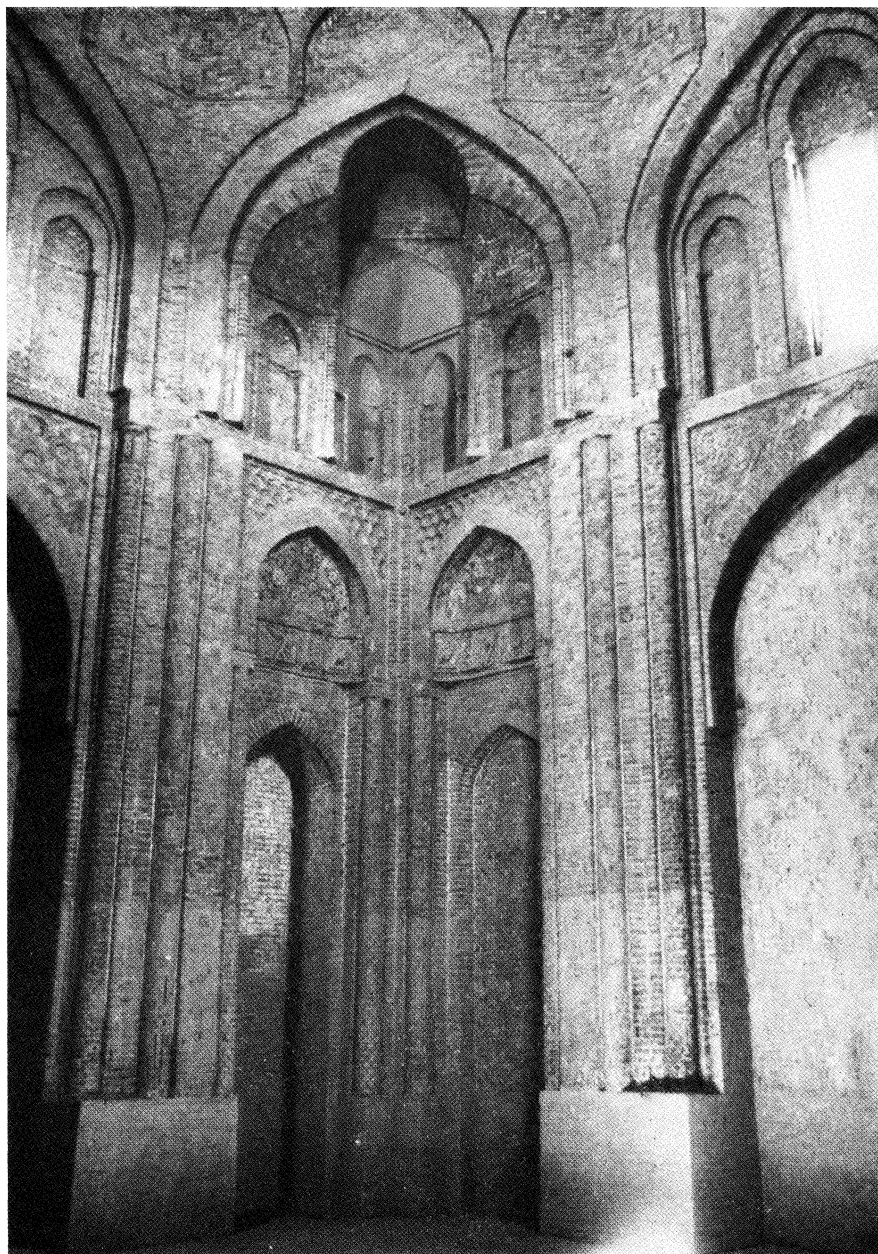
1 Varāmīn, mosque, entrance.



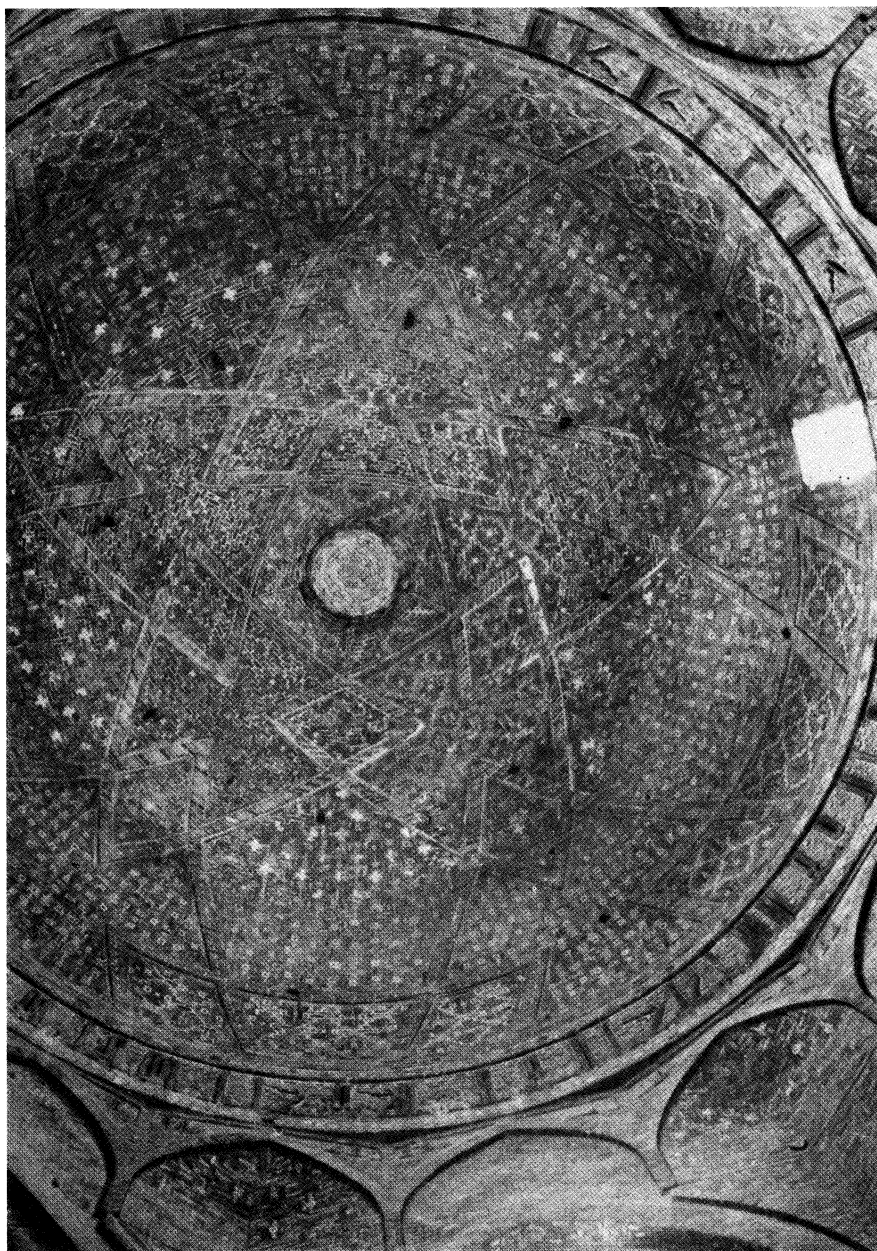
2 Varāmīn, mosque: (a) *īvān* on the *qibla* side; (b) dome from inside.



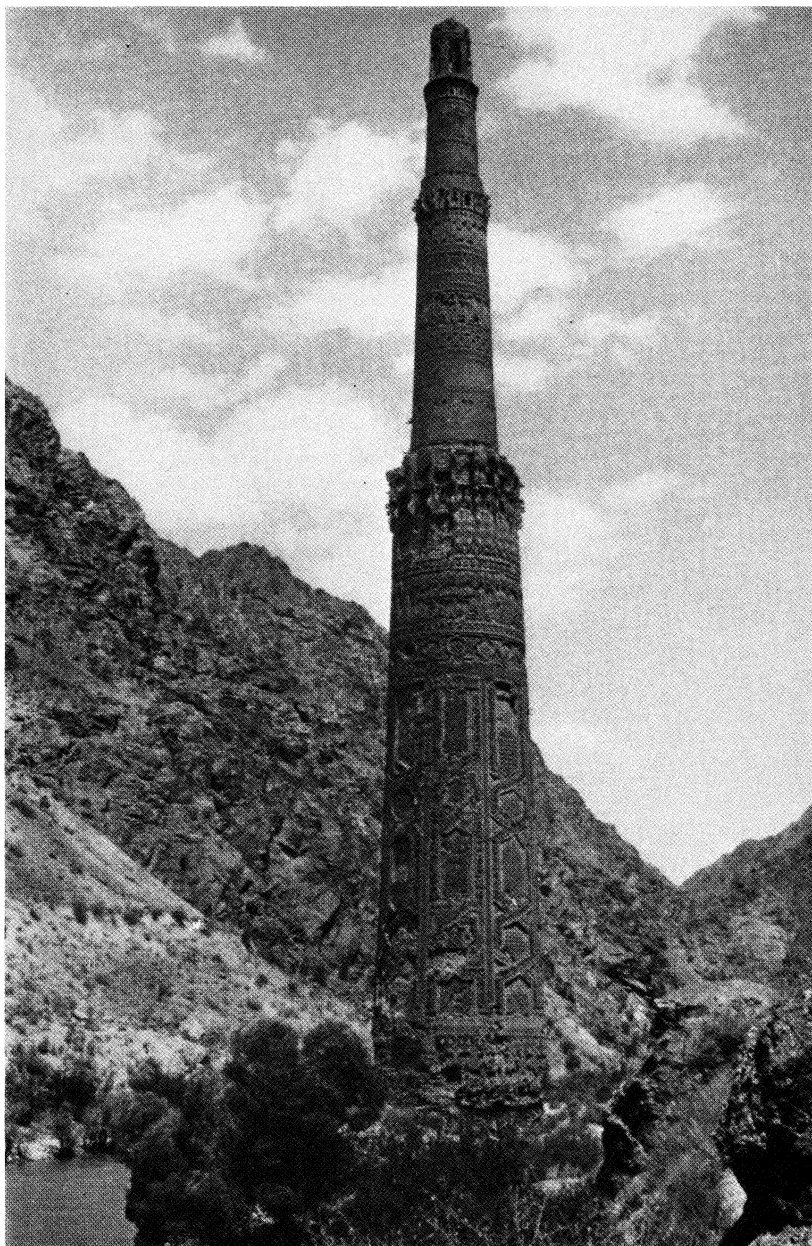
3 Işfahān, mosque: (a) court and *iwāns*; (b) south dome, zone of transition.



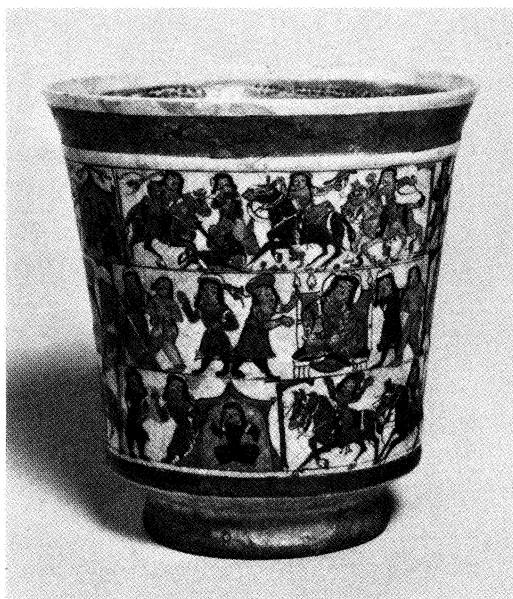
4 Isfahān, north dome, elevation.



5 Işfahān, north dome, from inside.



6 Jām, minaret.



7 (a) Sultāniyeh, upper part of mausoleum.
(b) Goblet with *Shāh-Nāma* scenes.



8 (a) Bowl with the story of Faridūn.
(b) Bowl signed by 'Ali b. Yūsuf.



9 (a) Dish signed by Shams al-Din al Ḥasanī.
(b) Dish.



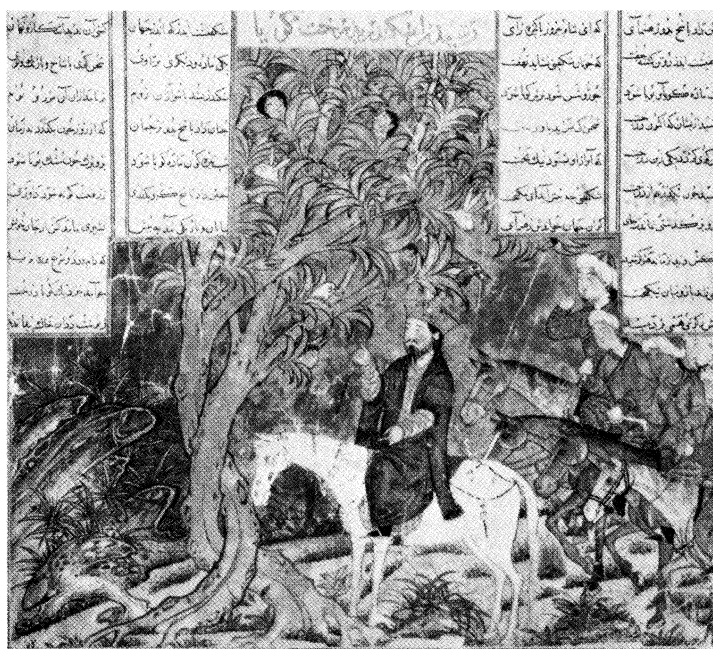
10 (a) Kettle, inlaid bronze.
(b) Cup, inlaid bronze.



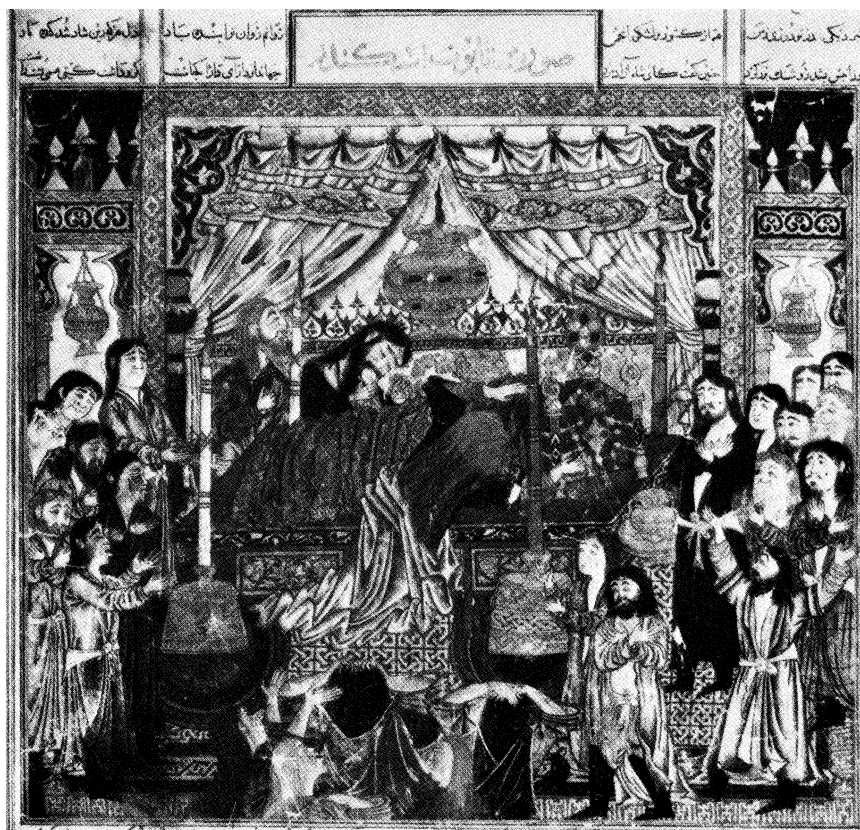
11 Incense burner.



12 (a) A scene from the story of Jacob.
(b) The tree of the Buddha.



- 13 (a) *Shāh-Nāma*, 1341: Rustam lifts the stone over Bizhan's pit.
 (b) *Shāh-Nāma*, fourteenth century: Alexander and the talking tree.



14 *Shāh-Nāma*, fourteenth century: the bier of Alexander.

